

NSC BRIEFING

16 February 1955

"SHAKE-UP" IN SOVIET SUPREME COURT?

- I. Against background last week's dramatic ouster Malenkov, Soviet announcement on 11 Feb of shifts in Supreme Court had initial ominous flavor.
- A. Supreme Soviet was told that six court members had been relieved of their posts, seven new members appointed.
 - B. This large a number of changes, all at once, would be quite unusual.
 - C. Curtailment of normal five-year term, in theory, occurs only in event of criminal prosecution of court member involved.
- II. Supreme Court has total 78 judges, divided into 5 "collegia" (criminal, civil, military, railroad transport, and water transport).
- A. Five (possibly all six) of replaced court members apparently on military Collegium, court that handles high level counter-revolutionary trials.
 - 1. Conducted purge trials of mid-1930's, which cemented Stalin's power.
 - 2. Tried Red Army high command (Marshal Tukhachevsky) in 1937: condemned Beria (1953).

- III. Thus, at first look, court shuffle could be interpreted as move to clear decks for purge of Malenkov's supporters, perhaps Malenkov himself.

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- A. Both Malenkov's retention on Party Presidium and absence of any confession of deviationist views (as distinct from leadership failure) in his "resignation" statement, suggest that Malenkov will not be purged immediately, [if at all.]
- B. However, under Stalin, no man suffered demotion like Malenkov's without ultimately being liquidated.
- C. Furthermore, Khrushchev's equation of consumer's goods men with "right deviationists" an ominous note.
- V. However, view of court shake-up as preparation for purge is far from conclusive.
- A. First, although changes announced after Malenkov fall, actually five of six court ousters happened in August '54; four of seven new appointments probably also came then.
1. Difficult to relate August court action to February drama.
 2. Furthermore, two of six relieved on grounds "illness and poor health."
- B. Finally, Supreme Court is largely rubber-stamp, under orders of party: trials could be held and sentences passed without fear of dissent or need for shuffle.